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ABSTRACT

A preliminary study explored how Canadian practitioners who are engaged in community economic development (CED) that includes or is specific to women gain new information relevant to their work and how they incorporate that new learning into their daily practice. Interview questions focused on sources of information, learning opportunities and processes, relative usefulness of different kinds of knowledge, and how practitioners managed to apply new knowledge to their work. Results indicated nearly all 15 participants identified lack of an organized source of information about women's CED as a problem. Other major themes were that all respondents reported multiple work duties that required different sets of knowledge; many sources were used to obtain the diverse information practitioners required; participant ratings suggested most organizations are engaged in ongoing efforts to incorporate and improve on CED best practice; failure to implement available knowledge was usually due to a lack of resources such as time and money; practitioners frequently reported applying their knowledge concerning class, gender, and other diversity issues to educate others involved in CED; and, for many practitioners, a clash of ideas about what counted as learning and valid knowledge occurred on a variety of fronts. The strongest implication of the results was the need for more CED funding. (Appendixes include interview results.) (YLB)

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NALL Working Paper #12-2000

Women and Community Economic Development: Changing Knowledge, Changing Practice: A Summary of Research Results

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prepared by Mary Stratton and Barbara Levine

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BACKGROUND

In association with the OISE-based Network for New approaches in Life-Long Learning (NALL), the Centre for the Study of Training, Investment and Economic Restructuring (CSTIER) has recently conducted a study concerning women and CED. The purpose of the research was to find out how practitioners engaged in CED that includes or is specific to women gain new information relevant to their work, and how they incorporate that new learning into their daily practice. Interview questions focused on sources of information, learning opportunities and processes, the relative usefulness of different kinds of knowledge, and how practitioners managed to apply new knowledge to their work. The question of if and how gender issues affected learning and practice was a central theme of the study. Identifying problems experienced by practitioners, along with their suggestions for improvements, was also a focus.

METHODOLOGY

Both NALL and CSTIER are committed to applying research methods which include the participation of those who are the subject of the study. In keeping with this, an interview schedule was collaboratively developed, and pilot-tested by a focus group of Toronto based CED workers.

Subsequently, the interview schedule, designed to collect closed-end quantitative and In-depth qualitative information, was applied in a preliminary study with 15 key informants currently employed by CED organizations across Canada. Telephone interviews (approximately one hour in length) were conducted with practitioners from a variety of different geographical, economic and social contexts, who are concerned with promoting CED activities that include women as participants and beneficiaries. The qualitative components of the interview transcripts were analysed by developing a thematic grid to identify common concerns and viewpoints. Anecdotal explanations of these themes were preserved. A copy of the interview schedule containing a full description of the results is available upon request.

OVERVIEW OF RESULTS

The research participants provided many rich insights into the process of learning about and doing CED with women. The lack of an organized source of information about women's CED was one of the problems identified by nearly all of the participants. Following are brief discussions of other major themes that emerged from the results.

Sources and sites of learning: All respondents reported multiple work duties (e.g., program

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development, program delivery, fund-raising, public relations, network creation, research, general administration) which required different sets of knowledge. Only three respondents were working with CED organizations that focused exclusively on women's CED - the majority of CED work with women occurred within a general CED context. In keeping with their varied job demands, practitioners' learning took place in different locations, with the job site being the most common, but community events, conferences, and at home were also frequently reported. Most participants were reasonably satisfied with the learning sites available to them, but noted areas that could be improved, including greater opportunity for formal CED learning opportunities (courses and conferences). Also problematic was the lack of uninterrupted paid time that could be devoted to gaining needed knowledge.

Many sources were used to obtain the diverse information practitioners required (a table of these results is available upon request). The sources which were used often and rated as most useful were: interactions with community members, reflection on personal practice experience, informal interactions with other practitioners, print material directed to CED practitioners, and workshops within the organization. Although mass media articles and the Internet were widely used, they were rated as less reliable and useful sources. The Internet was considered an excellent source by 25% of those who used it, but most respondents noted variable quality of information, and search difficulties. About 60% of practitioners had used a formal education course to gain CED related knowledge. Of these 54% found this to be a good to excellent source, but academic conferences and publications were less popular (used by 50% and 75% respectively) and received the two highest ratings as poor sources (44% and 21%). One of the problems cited was the lack of formal education courses, conferences, and material relating directly to CED practice. Another issue, discussed later, was the clash between the academic and the CED approaches to learning and valued knowledge.

Application of knowledge: Participants were asked to rate how well their organizations had incorporated generally established CED principles and some gender related goals. On the whole, ratings suggested that most organizations are engaged in on-going efforts to incorporate and improve on CED best practice. A widespread point of weakness concerned learning and training opportunities for CED staff where over half the respondents felt there was a serious deficiency of training opportunities. Principles related to gender, or other areas of participant diversity, were also less well rated with the availability of programs that were truly accessible to women being the most noted problem.

Failure to implement available knowledge was usually due to a lack of resources such as time and money, although resistance from organizational board members was also reported by several participants. When new programs or program supports were introduced, practitioners usually had to scrape up the required funding. Most often this required "selling" the new knowledge to a funder and/or a community partner. In order to do this, staff time had to be available, but most practitioners already felt they needed more staff hours. Despite the difficulties, respondents were highly innovative in finding funding, or inventing cost-free ways to integrate new knowledge into everyday practice as quickly as possible. This was easiest to bring about when knowledge could be passed directly from practitioner to program participant, but more problematic when the knowledge meant providing a support service such as child care or transportation. For example, if child care could not be provided to a program aimed at low-income mothers, then should the program go ahead? As one respondent put it: " [we develop] flexible models to meet women's schedules, their transportation needs...[to] offer a ride....But we have a terribly poor transport system [and] not enough licensed child care. It is not within the means of our organization to fund these things, even though we know about them."

Practitioners frequently reported applying their knowledge concerning class, gender and other diversity issues to educate others involved in providing CED, such as funders and board members. One participant offered the following six point plan to overcome resistance and achieve positive change:

1. Draw attention to past positives and the good things done.
2. Present the change as, therefore, complementary to what happened in the past.
3. Show why the change should be made for future achievement.
4. Ask for people's help - "I need help to get this done." Approach influential people in the community for needed support.
5. Show that there are no losers in a project - all parties are "winners," then it is difficult for people to say "no."
6. Be careful to understand where members of an organization (board) are coming from and not step on people's toes. Know
who you are dealing with and devise a plan (or set of individual plans) to talk about change.

Knowledge clashes: What is learning? Whose knowledge?: One of the strongest themes to emerge from the interview data was the posing of a challenge to traditionally accepted ideas about knowledge and learning. For many practitioners, this clash of ideas about what counted as learning and valid knowledge occurred on a variety of fronts as an inevitable part of their work. Many participants felt that CED was frequently disregarded as a valid socio-economic form of knowledge by business, government and academic sectors. Further, even when a CED approach was allowed to be useful, the kinds of learning the practitioners valued were not always counted as legitimate. Added to this was an awareness that the groups they served frequently held even less recognized kinds of knowledge, and had varied approaches to learning. Knowledge clashes occurred among the differing perspectives of class, gender, ethnicity, geography, and organizational position. Examples of these are best provided in the words of the research participants:

> The women's centre.... would be a good partner [but]...accepts the micro-economy uncritically. We are serving a different group....so, the question is whether they would see us as a partner. The class issue is within everything. In this case within the gender issue.

> Some Board members...have yet to meet even one of our borrowers...the expectations of what is in a business plan and the payment schedules are not in keeping with the abilities of our clients. Board members don't have a clue [about] who we work with - [about] the real dynamics.

> A funder walked in [to the centre] in a mink coat [and was] afraid to get it dirty. She's funding women on welfare! That sucks. It's totally inappropriate. There are class and economic conflicts between people investing in the program and the participants.

> I struggle with being female and doing the work I do....The chief [here] is male, which strikes a particular dynamic, and learning how to [manage] that is a huge part of what I do.

> One difference in doing CED in a rural area is you are seldom asked if you have the credential, but if you have the skill. In urban areas it is the reverse.... Many don't have CED backgrounds, but have moved into the area and are doing a good job. Others with [more] credentials in CED are not doing such a good job. With us, a lot is experiential because access to formal learning is limited...

In order to do their job, CED practitioners have to negotiate and mediate these knowledge clashes and that requires a special kind of learning. Respondents were asked about the relative importance of learning from different areas, such as technical, political, personal or integrated. Whilst practitioners recognized the need and usefulness of knowledge from all of those areas, they emphatically underlined that to be useful in CED practice, learning from various areas had to become integrated. As they explained, a process was involved in turning learning fragments into a useful CED knowledge base:

> The most useful by far is integrated knowledge; not just theory and applied, but the political and financial realities, the interactions, communications, and the technical. For example, I had technical knowledge on how to write a heck of a business plan to get financing from a bank. But I need to make that relevant to my political, social, financial context.
>
> We have to deal first with individuals and ways of thinking - to respond first to the human being. Then, the political and technical issues and knowledge are involved - neither can be ignored. For example, women's place in society, and then, what does the woman need to know to be in business? What do I need to know to organize a workshop? There are lots of resources for the technical, and information for the political, but if you can't listen to the personal stuff, then you can't integrate the other knowledge....In the end, integrated learning is what counts, but the above [description] is the process.

The practitioners' awareness of the content and process of their CED related learning prompted them to identify further tensions between what they need and what is available in the world of formalized learning. As one respondent put it, "I have the impression that university..., business life, and everyday [CED] client's life are very different worlds." A major problem identified was the failure of formal learning bodies to recognize the importance and usefulness of informal learning, especially experiential knowledge. Such failure tended to impact women the most because often they "learn in a classroom setting that the way they conceive a problem is not right." Male defined learning is removed from the way women usually learn and understand and formal learning settings seldom promoted the kind of interactive and experiential learning that the CED practitioners identified as most desirable.

Even when practitioners could identify formal learning opportunities they felt would be beneficial, they frequently faced barriers in accessing them. Very few formal programs are specifically designed for CED practice and even where these exist, sufficient financing is seldom available. Only one respondent reported that her learning opportunities had been entirely covered by her organization. In contrast, 30% of practitioners had financed 100% of the cost of their learning opportunities and almost 70% had covered at least some of the expenses themselves. One quarter of participants reported having to miss a learning opportunity because of the lack of either time or financing.

IMPLICATIONS

Some of the implications of the above results seem clear, if difficult to resolve. Top of the list is the need for more CED funding, especially for programs that provide supportive learning environments for practitioners and the program participants. This means recognizing women's CED and learning needs often require specific and different supports than those of men. The lack of adequate funding reflects the practitioner identified problem that CED practice is not sufficiently recognized as a legitimate and effective knowledge approach. The study transcripts are a testament to the determination and resourcefulness of Canadian CED work with women, nevertheless it is hard to move ahead without appropriate recognition and resources. The following list reflects some of the concrete initiatives participants identified as helpful to gaining knowledge about women and CED and better applying it in everyday practice:

- More Canadian resources that focus specifically on CED work with women (print, list serves, web pages, formal education courses).
- More opportunities to interact with other CED practitioners (in person and/or electronically), in order to share experiences and problems, exchange ideas and develop solutions that further effective CED practice.
- Canadian focused, clearly defined, strategies for creating healthy, caring communities for women,

that regognize their diversity.

- A commitment to building partnerships and coalitions to achieve community goals and constructive change that include consciousness of issues of class, gender and other diversities.
- A commitment, at all levels, to valuing different kinds of knowledge and ways of learning and working to accommodate these into formal and community based educational initiatives.
- National evaluation programs and dissemination of resulting insights, so that practitioners do not feel they are working in isolation, or wasting time "reinventing the wheel."
- Specific CED events in regional locations, that go beyond the usual traditional formats to promote a more "hands-on" exchange of ideas among CED workers (for example, a CED Fair, where organizations have booths to display their programs).

FURTHER INFORMATION

Little Canadian research has occurred concerning how CED practitioners gain knowledge about women and CED, and subsequently apply that to their practice. The CSTIER study is only a small beginning, but we hope that it will prove a stepping stone to further research, and that it will promote the sharing of existing Canadian knowledge. A copy of the interview schedule with details of the results for each question is available upon request. A longer discussion paper focusing on the issues of what is valued as learning and knowledge is being developed and can also be forwarded if requested.

APPENDIX

INFORMATION SOURCES USED TO GAIN KNOWLEDGE ABOUT CED WORK WITH WOMEN

Source of Information	Used N[1]	Used %[2]	Excellent Source %	Good Source %	Fair Source %	Poor Sources %	Varies[3] %
Formal university/ college course	11	61	27	27	36	9	0
Workshop at your organization	14	78	36	50	7	0	7
Workshop organized by community	15	83	33	33	13	7	13
Academic conference/seminar	9	50	0	44	0	44	11
Professional Conference/seminar	16	89	50	25	0	13	13
Books, articles, pamphlets directed to CED practitioners	17	94	53	41	0	0	6
Academic publications (university library books, journals)	14	78	7	36	29	21	7
Mass Media articles	18	100	0	44	44	11	0
Documentaries	15	83	13	33	47	7	0
Electronic networks, news groups, listserves	13	72	23	54	15	0	8
Organized networking events with community members	17	94	47	12	29	0	12
Informal interactions with community members	18	100	67	22	11	0	0
Informal in-person interactions with other practitioners	17	94	82	12	6	0	0
Reflection and analysis of own practice experience	18	100	44	56	0	0	0
Internet (WWW) N = 14[4]	12	85	25	42	33	0	0
Other (list): Telephone Interactions	1	6	100	0	0	0	0
Personal e-mail exchanges	2	11	0	50	0	0	50

1 Total Respondents: N=18 (15 telephone interviews plus three individual responses from the pilot focus group). Therefore, the percentage of respondents who used a source is calculated out of 18 (excepting note 4 below). The percentage rating for the source is calculated using the N for that source (as listed in the used column).

2 Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

3 Respondents said the quality of the source varied to widely to rate - some were excellent whereas others were very poor.

4 The item for Internet searches was not included at the pilot stage and this oversight was not noted until the second telephone interview, when the respondent brought it to the attention of the research team. It was added for the remaining interviews.

INCORPORATION OF ESTABLISHED CED PRINCIPLES AND GENDER-RELATED GOALS INTO ACTUAL CED PRACTICE

Incorporated in Projects	Not at all %[1]	Very Little %	Quite Well %	Very Well %	Can't Rate %
Awareness of the productive value of the informal economy (e.g., housework, reproduction, volunteering)	11	17	28	39	5
Consideration of gender issues	0	28	33	33	5
Consideration of ethnicity and culture	0	33	33	33	0
Consideration of the social, cultural & ecological costs, as well as the financial	0	17	28	56	0
Co-operative relationships for mutual benefits	5	0	39	50	5
Importance of a sense of community	5	0	28	67	0
Women have representation at every project stage	0	17	39	44	0
Representation from diverse groups of women	0	50	28	22	0
Creation of hope in the lives of disadvantaged people	0	5	28	56	11
Sufficient training for CED workers	11	44	28	11	5
Sufficient technical assistance for program participants	0	33	33	22	11
Truly accessible programs (e.g., scheduling, child-care, support counselling)	17	39	5	28	11
Thorough evaluation of program outcomes	0	22	44	22	11
Opportunities for inquiry and dialogue	0	5	39	50	5
Collaboration and team-learning	0	0	33	50	17
Continuous learning opportunities for staff	0	28	44	17	11
Continuous learning opportunities for program participants	11	22	28	22	17

1Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THE CED FUNDING MOSAIC
BY RESPONSE FREQUENCY (N=15)

FUNDERS: 15

-> government 15
- federal 10
- provincia 11
- municipal 5

->Business 7
-> Foundations 6

-> Private individuals 6
-> Non-profit community 3
-> Churches 2
-> Community Futures 2
-> Labour movement 2
-> First Nations 1
-> University 1

Participants' comments

Grass roots money is a problem - [money] to mobilize the community to form a plan to apply for training funds from CEDTAP. If CEDTAP gave mobilization money I could think of really creative ways to do it. But CED animation dollars are needed to get it going.

Some projects we don't do because there is no money for child care. We hope we can always get the money (somehow), so we don't have to not do it. We don't apply for funding that won't cover child care. If we did then we would use our general fund....This is our general principal for all programs - [there must be] support...either directly or through our liaisons.

KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE MOST USEFUL TO CED PRACTITIONERS (BY FREQUENCY MENTIONED N=15)

Knowledge exchanges with participant community	6
Interactions/exchanges of knowledge with other practitioners about women's needs and CED approaches	6
Practical knowledge that can be applied	3
Basic information about women's circumstances	3
Adapted International models	2
CED books/periodicals	2
Information on evaluation measurements	2
That of mentors and role models	2
Women-focused list serve	2
My personal experience as a woman	2
On the job experience (learning by doing)	2
Formal education when focused and 'hands on'	1
he peer lending concept	1
Local studies and events about women's issues	1
How to build self-esteem	1
No difference for men or women	1

Illustrative Quotes:

The knowledge and experience I gained personally [by] being a sole-support mother, with a handicapped child, on social assistance....is most helpful in my dealings with low-income women, because I understand what they are experiencing.

Just having an understanding of where women are coming from in their lives. What barriers they face....I [have] mainly gained [this knowledge] from client groups themselves.

We have to deal first with individuals and ways of thinking....Then, the political and technical issues and knowledge are involved - neither can be ignored. For example, women's place in society, and then, what does the woman need to know to be in business? What do I need to know to organize a workshop? There are lots of resources for the technical, and information for the political, but if you can't listen to the personal stuff, then you can't integrate the other knowledge.

NEW KNOWLEDGE ABOUT WOMEN AND CED:
WAYS TO APPLY IT TO PRACTICE

Developed flexible program models to meet women's needs	7
Through evaluation and reflection	3
By promoting peer support/peer groups	3
Directly applying the new knowledge to practice (dynamic approach)	2
Providing training/information in the way the women learn it	2
"Walk our talk" organizationally (right systems in place)	2
Ensuring funders will cover the supports women need	1
Including women and men in project planning	1
Formally addressing the new knowledge (a retreat, seminar)	1
Creatively adapting traditional models	1
Community partnerships to provide the women's needs	1
Emphasize the need for hands-on training and support	1

Illustrative quotes

We have a great business plan for participants - we talk it - but not always walk it [organizationally]. We need our own organizational business plan - clear and set out and able to be evaluated. So there is a process of introspection.

Some projects we don't do because there is no money for child care. We hope we can always get the money (somehow), so we don't have to not do it. We don't apply for funding that won't cover child care. If we did then we would use our general fund....[there has to be] support...either directly or through our liaisons.

We critically examine what we are doing, our results and the participation levels of women. These are our measures. A lot of times it's a compromise.

GENDER ISSUES IN CED PRACTICE

There is a real misunderstanding about gender issues for the most part....Most people don't understand [the issues] so I have to go back to square one and lay them out, so that people can understand the socially constructed relations between men and women.

I struggle with being female and doing the work I do....The chief [here] is male, which strikes a particular dynamic, and learning how to [manage] that is a huge part of what I do.

There is real sympathy for low income women, and single parents in particular. The problem is [that there is also] a recognition that it is so much harder for those women to succeed in business, and of the limits of the support we can offer. We end up thinking, "can this woman pull this off? I don't think so."

Some Board members...have yet to meet even one of our borrowers...the expectations of what is in a business plan and the payment schedules are not in keeping with the abilities of our clients. Board members don't have a clue [about] who we work with - [about] the real dynamics.

A funder walked in [to the centre] in a mink coat [and was] afraid to get it dirty. She's funding women on welfare! That sucks.

When men are involved in funding decisions we sometimes feel that we have a harder sell. If the man has no feminist conscience and thinks women should be at home with the kids (and we have encountered that), then it is a very hard sell.

CHANGING PRACTICE:
A PARTICIPANT'S SIX-POINT GUIDE

1. Draw attention to past positives and the good things done.

2. Present the change as, therefore, complementary to what happened in the past.

3. Show why the change should be made for future achievement

4. Ask for people's help - "I need help to get this done." Approach influential people in the community for needed support.

5. Show that there are no losers in a project - all parties are "winners," Then it is difficult for people to say 'no.'

6. Be careful to understand where members of an organization (Board) are coming from and not step on people's toes. Know who you are dealing with and devise a plan (or set of individual plans) to talk about

change.

ISSUES RELATED TO WOMEN AND CED PRACTICE

Obtaining adequate, secure long-term funding for CED work, that includes a recognition that women (and other groups) sometimes require specific special supports as components of a program.

Gaining recognition that CED practice is a legitimate and effective knowledge approach to developing healthy and sustainable communities.

Advancing Canadian focused, clearly defined, strategies for creating healthy, caring communities for women, that recognize their diversity.

Developing more Canadian resources that focus specifically on CED work with women.

Ensuring a commitment, at all levels, to valuing different kinds of knowledge and ways of learning and working to accommodate these into formal and community based educational initiatives.

Creating more opportunities to interact with other CED practitioners in order to share experiences and problems, exchange ideas and develop solutions that further effective CED practice.

Developing national evaluation programs and dissemination of resulting insights, so that practitioners do not feel they are working in isolation, or wasting time "reinventing the wheel."

Offering CED events in regional locations, that go beyond the usual traditional formats to promote a more "hands-on" exchange of ideas among CED workers (for example, a CED Fair).